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S P E E C H

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OF

COMMODORE STOCKTON.

Delivered at Rahway, September 4, 1856.

(The Villages, &c.)

TRENTON:

PRINTED BY C. W. TOLLES,
AT THE OFFICE OF THE STATE GAZETTE.

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Bright fund

Stockton, Robert Field, 1795-1866.

S P E E C H.

MEN OF THE AMERICAN PARTY—AMERICANS— FRIENDS—

We are indeed friends—bound together by the same faith in the institutions of our Fathers, and by the same hopes for the preservation of the Constitution of the United States and its compromises, and for the perpetuity of the Union, upon which depend not only the prosperity and glory of our country, but the best interests of civil and religious liberty throughout the world. Break this Union into fragments, and one universal shout of joy from despotism and infidelity will read the air. But I came not here for declamation. The times are too portentous of evil to permit a multiplication of words without wisdom. I have no wisdom—my oration must therefore be brief.

Fellow Citizens, There may be many professional politicians in New Jersey, whose importance depends entirely upon the success of their party, and a prompt and servile obedience to that oligarchy of politicians who have superseded the action of the people in designating Presidential candidates.

But there are not many disunionists amongst us. Happily, monsters are few and rare specimens of creation. There is no necessity, therefore, for acrimony or abuse in the discussion of political topics in New Jersey. I believe our citizens generally are anxious to promote the welfare, safety and happiness of the republic. The people of New Jersey are moral, reasonable, thinking, patriots. If any of those who differ from me on the presidential question could be convinced, as I am, that the safety and welfare of the country demand the election of Mr. Fillmore, I do not doubt that they would vote for him. Americans, we are threatened with a crisis of great danger in relation to public affairs.

Democrats, Republicans and Americans, all agree I believe that there is danger in the present political condition of the country. We all agree in the existence of the danger. But we differ as to the proper means of averting that danger. It is supposed by many of our wisest, most prudent and sagacious citizens, that the strength of our political institutions will soon be tested again, and some think that they will have to go through the ordeal of fire and the sword. It cannot be denied that great apprehension pervades the whole country, and that all are looking forward with fearful anxiety to the result of the ensuing Presidential election.

For myself I am filled with concern in the

anticipation of the future; and this great gathering of the people seems to indicate that others are of the same opinion.

The question of slavery has been again most unnecessarily, if not viciously, agitated by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. The public honor has been tarnished, and we are threatened with a general demoralization of political integrity.

The construction given to the Constitution in relation to the extension of slavery by the representatives of the people in Congress assembled, amongst whom were many of the wisest and best men of the age, and approved and sustained for more than thirty years by the people, has been repudiated, and the country has been thrown back upon the fearful crisis of 1820, and menaced with still greater danger.

In 1820, on the application for the admission of Missouri into the Union, the question as to the extension of slavery in the territories was raised, and created an excitement throughout the country, far greater than had been experienced since the adoption of the Constitution.

It was discussed with great ability and vehemence in and out of Congress, the South insisting that by the Constitution they had the right to take their slaves in any of the territories of the United States, the North insisting with as much pertinacity that slavery was restricted to the original thirteen states.

This discussion was continued in Congress, by the press, and at public meetings, all over the country, until the feelings of the people became aroused and inflamed, and threatened a dissolution of the Union.

Neither party would yield, and the friends of the Union, appalled at the impending crisis, called for a settlement of that exciting Constitutional question then and forever. It could not be postponed—the peril was imminent—there was no time to amend the Constitution. To agree upon a construction of that part of the Constitution which would satisfy the South and the North, was all that could be done at that time to save the Union.

After the most deliberate consideration, and after every argument had been exhausted, with a view to the final adjustment of that vexed difficulty, to secure tranquillity to the country, and to avoid further sectional agitation, it was agreed by the North and the South, by men of all parties and all sections, that the future reading of the Constitution should restrict slavery to the South of 36 degrees and 30 minutes of north latitude. The only way by which

this patriotic and fraternal sentiment could then be expressed and incorporated in the Constitution, was by an act of Congress.

The Missouri Compromise was therefore adopted by Congress, and approved by the people, with the exception of comparatively a small body of Abolitionists, who at that time were unimportant as a political organisation. In this view of the subject, it is not candid nor just to say that the Compact of Peace thus made and ratified, was a mere act of Congress, liable to repeal as any other ordinary legislation. It is rather to be considered in the light of a solemn and final decree of the highest court of judicature, and not subject to reversal or reversal. As the agreed law of the Constitution, placed under the protection of the public faith, it could not authoritatively be repealed, without the general consent of the people. Certainly no snap judgment should have been taken. Without notice it has been repealed, and without any substitute being suggested, and as I before observed, the country is thrown back upon the fearful agitation of 1820, with no hope, in my judgment, of escape, but in the election of Mr. Fillmore.

The repeal of that Compact of Peace is wholly indefensible, without, as far as I have been able to discover, even a plausible argument to sustain it, and I have read most of the speeches on the subject, and have conversed with many persons from the North and South. Their speeches are mere *stereotypes* of those made in 1820. They have thrown no more light on the subject,—have adduced no new or original arguments or thoughts to justify the repeal. It strikes me as a mere wanton reproach of their predecessors, and a reckless trifling with the peace of the country, to sustain personal and party ends. I am more amazed at the conduct of the Statesmen of the South than the Men of the North. When the South was comparatively much stronger than now, counselled and led on by the purest, ablest, and most patriotic men of our times, she made that treaty of peace and friendship with the other states. Why she has consented to repeal it, will amaze future generations as much as it has amazed the present. I speak this more in sorrow than in anger. I am now, as I have always been, their firm, unflinching friend. I love their ardor and admire their generous feelings, and especially I applaud the many sacrifices which they have time after time offered upon the altar of their country's glory. But I would save them now from themselves—their enemies they can take care of. I would conjure them to remember that a political blunder has been considered no virtue—that it is the duty of a patriotic, practical Statesman, not only to satisfy himself of the truth of any abstract political proposition, but to ascertain whether he has the power to enforce it, before he presumes to place the destiny of an empire upon its success.

By what I have said I do not mean to intimate that the South took the initiative in the repeal of the Compromise. It did not—but Northern demagogues stepped forward and sought to purchase the support of the South for the Presidency—by the surrender of the landmarks which have been established for the benefit of Northern free labor. The South acceded to the proposition. Mr. Buchanan and other leaders of the Democratic party approved of the repeal, and thus the Democratic party forfeited its national character and became a mere sectional party. So far as it respects the issues now involved, the Democratic party is sectional. Its organs concede Kansas to the South. If the South will only use the means afforded to it, Kansas will be a Slave State. The Democratic party relies for its hopes chiefly on the South—it is utterly demoralised and disorganised in most of the Free States—I know that there are Democratic organisations in all the Free States; but because the Democratic party has become sectional, those organisations, with the exception of those in Illinois, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, are feeble and ineffective. The South having thus sectionalised the Democratic party, and put all who hesitate to join them under the "ban of the Empire," proud of their glorious antecedents, and relying upon the strength of a bright galaxy of honoured names, defy the North to the strife. The North, aroused by supposed wrongs and insults to a sense of their dignity and power, has accepted the issue, and has likewise presented a sectional candidate in the person of Colonel Fremont in opposition to Mr. Buchanan. I have not one word to say against the personal characters of these gentlemen, and I have nothing to say against their public characters, except this, that they are both wrong in permitting themselves to be run upon platforms got up by designing demagogues and professional resolution makers. Mr. Buchanan (I mean my old friend James Buchanan) all will concede was amongst the most eminent men of the times for his lofty patriotism and high conservative principles, and if placed on his own platform, would have had my vote. But Mr. Buchanan, the representative of demagogues whose platform will destroy the Union, cannot have my vote any more than my friend Col. Alexander, who stands on the same platform, and is no less distinguished for his high personal character.

It is not the first time that I have been constrained by motives of patriotic duty to differ with the oracles of the Democratic party, when in the plenitude of their power, as to their construction of the Democratic creed, and in their views of public policy; but in no instance has it caused me so great personal sacrifice as I will make in voting against these gentlemen. But the times are perilous—the country is in too much danger to permit personal confidence and friendship to outweigh the claims of duty. In my judgment their

platform will produce anarchy and revolution. I must vote against them.

So, too, with Fremont, who is in the hands of demagogues of another section, who will as certainly drive the South to secession, as the South is in a fair way to goad the North to the same result. I cannot vote for him.

The issue arising from the repeal of the Missouri Compromise cannot be settled by the election of Buchanan or Fremont. The election of Buchanan will only be a triumph to the South over the North; that of Fremont will only be a triumph of the North over the South—leaving the great difficulty unsettled—increasing the agitation—and leaving the Union still in jeopardy.

Fellow Citizens—These are dangerous parties! Both these parties exist and war on each other in defiance of Washington's precepts and advice. Were there no national party, which could control their excesses and check their extreme designs, the Union would soon be broken up; one or the other party would obtain possession of the Government; the conquered section would revolt and the Union be dissolved.

Americans—In this condition of public affairs, the American party which has recently sprung into existence only to resist the growth of foreign influence, and to uphold the religion of our fathers, constitutes the only organization from which a movement could proceed for the presentation of a Union, national candidate.—You have repudiated all sectional dogmas and men, and now stand with your time honored, well tried, patriotic Fillmore, upon a national platform. I have nothing to say for Mr. Fillmore but what his whole life sanctions. I have no desire to magnify his fame by heaping up lofty and unmeaning encomiums upon him. I point to his acts; they will speak more eloquently of the debt of gratitude which the whole country owes him. He saved us once, and can and will, by God's assistance, save us again.

"But what will he do with the negro question?" inquires the sectional and one idea man who belongs to the Republican or Democratic party. Mr. Fillmore, if elected, I'll pledge myself, will not permit border ruffians to drive out Northern free State men from Kansas, nor will he permit the latter to kindle the flames of civil war. Mr. Fillmore will act as he has heretofore acted under similar circumstances, and as the President of this Nation should act. He will be the partisan of neither the North nor the South, and if necessary, he will compel peace in that disturbed quarter with the whole force of the Government. Americans—stand by your leader and the integrity of your principles; and by strenuous efforts and sacrifices vindicate your claim to be the true American Democracy; and my word for it, you will draw to your ranks a large secession from that patriotic multitude who regard the welfare of the nation as of more importance than the success of a party. Claim-

ing to be now, as at all times heretofore, a consistent Democrat, a friend to the free laborer of the North, as well as to the slave of the South—a friend to all national improvements, and to all the elements of national independence and defence, it is with regret that I have felt compelled to disapprove of the course of the Democratic party in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. I am assured of the soundness of my views respecting it, by the fact that the great body of the Democracy of New Jersey likewise disapprove of it. Mr. Buchanan himself, in a letter of Aug. 21. 1848, to Hon. Mr. Sandford of Alabama, says—"Having urged the adoption of the Missouri Compromise, the inference is irresistible, that Congress, in my opinion, possesses the power to legislate upon the subject of slavery in the Territories. What an absurdity would it then be, if, whilst asserting this sovereign power in Congress—which power, from its nature, must be exclusive—I should in the very same breath, also claim this identical power for the population of a Territory in an unorganised capacity! I cling to the Missouri Compromise with greater tenacity than ever."

Also in a letter to the Hon. Mr. Yancy, May 18th, 1848, he says:

"I cannot abandon the position which I have thus deliberately and conscientiously taken, and assume any other that can be presented."

The truth is, the whole country, men of all parties, disapprove of it—and nothing but a superstitious fear of party discipline prevents one united shout of reprobation from the people of New Jersey. It betrayed and cheated the friends of the Union and the Compromises of 1850, and rewarded the national agitators. The danger and obloquy incurred by that act of repeal is redeemed by no practical benefit to the South or to the North; its capacity for mischief has been as flagrant as its imbecility for good.

The Compromise measures of 1850 fully established on an immutable basis the doctrine of non-intervention by Congress with the internal concerns of the Territories. The repeal of the Missouri Restriction only opened the anti-slavery controversy anew, and revived the dying embers of sectional agitation. Therefore, although I am sure of the Constitutional soundness of the principle of non-intervention, I nevertheless disapprove of the repeal of the Missouri Restriction at the time, and under the circumstances of the case. The Repeal act was passed in violation of a positive agreement to which we were a party. We yielded our views of the meaning of the Constitution for the sake of peace, and thereby pledged ourselves to stand by the Compromise, and could not, therefore, honorably take advantage of a temporary majority to rescind that agreement. It is not because I have altered my opinion with regard to the original meaning of the Constitution, that I am opposed to the repeal, but because I consider it a mat-

ter of personal as well as of national honor to stand by the Missouri Compromise, having acquiesced in it, and supported it for thirty years.

The design of the Compromise measure was to ensure peace. The result of the repeal of the Missouri Restriction has been to provoke war. As a political movement, it was a dangerous blunder. It has subjected the country to a most hazardous agitation, and may yet compel the Union to endure an ordeal surpassing in severity any ever heretofore experienced. Whatever the astute lawyer or wily politician may say, there is no doubt the sentiment of the North considered the Missouri Compromise in the nature of a solemn compact, invested with the sanctity of a pledge of the National Faith. Such a sentiment can never be violated with impunity. The authors of the infraction of that respected pledge will, in my opinion, yet deplore the temerity of the experiment which they have made on the feelings of the people and the tenacity of party predilection.

The formation of a great northern anti-slavery party has been the hope of many demagogues in both extremities of the Union, but all attempts to accomplish that object were abortive, until the repeal of the Missouri Restriction relieved the paralysis with which they were always previously afflicted. That measure breathed newness of life into the dispirited hearts of sectional agitators. Like the fabled giant of antiquity, they have arisen from their former prostration with renewed energy. It is palpable to my mind, that the advent of such a party to the possession of the Federal Government would be fatal to the Union.

That fifteen States, comprising some of the fairest and most fertile portions of this Continent, and inhabited by warlike, gallant, and enlightened freemen, would submit to see this government controlled exclusively by demagogues of another section, banded together upon the principle of aggressive and unconstitutional interference with their rights. No one need be foolish enough to believe. I look upon all sectional parties of this sort, therefore, with abhorrence. Nothing can justify their organization, and nothing but evil can result from their action. The only safety against such combinations is the union of national and patriotic men upon Mr. Fillmore.

I avow the opinion that there are sufficient materials for a successful Union National Fillmore Party, from which we may expect the redemption of the country from its present danger, and its rescue from the hands of the present free soil and secession coalition. It has always been the case, that the nominee for the presidency of the party in power has been held responsible for the measures and conduct of his predecessor. No particular warfare has been waged against the administration, for the

reason that it never commanded sufficient respect to render it worth while for any party to dignify it with the character of an adversary.

A prominent friend and supporter of the administration has been set up, with his connivance, as a candidate for the succession. The leading features of his government will necessarily be put in issue. In that event, if the only opponent of such nominee were a fusion anti-slavery Republican, of the Wilson and Giddings school, I would tremble for my country. It is my hope that the great body of the people constituting a national party will rally around Mr. Fillmore, the presidential candidate on whose standard is inscribed the motto of the great Jackson, "The Union, it must be preserved," in preference to any nominee of any packed convention, likely to perpetuate the ascendancy of the present coalition administration, or the anti-slavery Republican party.

But these principles or measures unfortunately are not alone sufficient to cope with the perilous condition of public affairs. Protestant Americans have perceived of late years that their Catholic fellow citizens, in their exercise of the electoral franchise, are controlled and marshalled by their priests. That dangerous order of men have manifested here the characteristics by which they have been distinguished elsewhere for more than a thousand years.—The settled, systematic effort to render civil and political affairs in the state subordinate to the authority of their hierarchy, which so often and so long agitated Europe, has excited alarm in the breast of numbers in this country. For the most part, the United States were originally colonized by those who sought refuge and an asylum here against ecclesiastical persecution. It is quite natural that the descendants of those who were driven from the homes of their ancestors by religious intolerance, should look with a jealous eye upon the interference with politics here, which is practised by Catholic zealots and prelates. When we see the whole population of that persuasion casting their votes with perfect unanimity one way, and obeying implicitly the secret commands of ecclesiastical dignitaries, it is but the precaution of salutary wisdom to adopt some sanitary measures to guard against that arrogant domination which, elsewhere, we find the ally of despotism, and the everlasting enemy of civil liberty. The principles of Religious Toleration which our fathers established here, can never be infringed. The only way, therefore, in which the grasping ambition, and the dangerous interference of the emissaries of the Roman autocrat can be encountered, is at the ballot box, in preferring the Protestant and refusing support to all those who acknowledge spiritual allegiance to the Pope. It is not the religion of the Catholic to which we object, or the free exercise of which we would restrain. But it is those professors of it only, whose sub-

jection to a foreign hierarchy conflicts with their duties as American citizens. It is that subjection which we condemn, and not the religion itself. Upon the same principle, therefore, on which the Democrat prefers for office a Democrat, and the Whig prefers a Whig;—upon the same principle, and in the exercise of the same right, that we indulge personal and individual preferences in giving our votes, Americans say that they will prefer for office the Protestant. To deny to Americans the indulgence of this preference, is to deny the most undoubted right of a free man. It is the essence of intolerance to restrain this right.

The Pope himself, could he proclaim his political Bull as the law of America, could impose no more arbitrary restriction on the liberties of Americans than to deny them the right of preferring the Protestant to the Catholic. It is well known that in the municipal contests in our villages and populous districts, the Presbyterian will often prefer the adherent to his own faith. So, too, the Methodist will prefer for office the Methodist. This exercise of the largest liberty no one has seen fit to proscribe. But Americans are stigmatised as bigots and enemies of toleration, because from the purest and most patriotic motives they exercise a freedom of opinion and action conceded to all others. We care not who fights the battles of the Romish despot's dominion in America, we are against him. He shall not, without a struggle, acquire the ascendancy in America. If error there must be, it is far better that we should err in excess of vigilance for the preservation of our liberties, than to err in neglect of that vigilance. The Protestant feeling and jealousy of Americans is defensive, not aggressive. They have been excited by the unwise demonstrations on the part of portions of the Catholic population, under the guidance of crafty ecclesiastics and mercenary demagogues. It is in vain to endeavor to allay the awakened fear of Protestants by asserting that the desire for universal empire which once animated the breasts of the haughty ecclesiastics who claim to be the vicegerents of heaven, has passed away and no longer animates the conclave of cardinals. It is not so, as the world has recently witnessed in the case of Sardinia; and only recent intelligence informs us that the Bull of the Pope constitutes the only obstruction to the most important reforms in Spain. It is true that his power, once supreme in Europe, is now limited by the greater diffusion of knowledge and liberty. But the Pope is still the same aspiring potentate who once gave law to Europe; whose interdict laid Empires at his feet, humbling the proudest monarchs and suspending the obedience of their subjects. It is true that he no longer proclaims the dogma that "no faith is to be kept with heretics," but we well know that his subtle and ever active instruments continue to practice upon that dogma, and inculcate it as an abiding obligation. The influence of Ca-

tholic priestcraft is exerted *secretly*, and their clandestine commands are obeyed with a servility and promptitude at once formidable and astounding. The secrecy of their political machinations very naturally suggested to Americans, upon the first formation of the American party the necessity for combatting their hostile designs with a similar secrecy of procedure. But that secrecy under cover of which the whole Catholic vote of the United States has been concentrated upon the candidates approved by the heads of the church, without complaint by our opponents—as soon as it is used defensively to counteract the insidious and dangerous aggression of sectarian ambition—that secrecy, on the part of Americans, practiced to uphold and defend our liberty and our Constitution, is assailed with all the malevolence of denunciation, and all the vituperation of vindictive hatred.

A few words as to the naturalization laws and I am done. Not content with insisting upon sharing the patronage of the Government and State with the foreign born, our opponents likewise object to extending the period of time, which it is proposed to fix at twenty-one years, before the emigrant shall be entitled to exercise the prerogative of American sovereignty. Our own children, many of them superior in qualifications and intelligence at the age of sixteen to the foreigner, we do not permit to vote until they have attained the age of twenty-one years. But it is insisted that foreigners shall enjoy this privilege sooner. They are to be invested with greater privileges in this case than the native born, and that we discriminate in their favor and *against* our own flesh and blood. The right of voting is not a natural right; it is conferred under such limitations and qualifications as the people choose to prescribe. Aliens, women, minors, and transient residents, are denied the privilege. We have sanctioned a near approximation to universal suffrage, only because, from the general diffusion of education, Americans are almost universally qualified to vote intelligently. The exceptions among the native born are few and singular, where the voter is deficient in the capacity to exercise the elective franchise with proper intelligence. But the great mass of the foreign emigrants are notoriously far inferior to the native born; and where they are not so, ignorance of our institutions, manners and customs, disqualifies them from the judicious performance of the functions of sovereignty.

Their good, identified with the public welfare, as well as the safety of our institutions, requires a probation of at least twenty-one years before they should be admitted to the full privileges of citizens. Had the founders of our Government anticipated the swarms of emigrants which annually land upon our shores, they would probably have refused to confer on Congress the power to pass any naturalization laws.

Were the foreign emigrant invariably born and reared under a free government, were he always educated and enlightened, even beyond the average of our own native countrymen—prudence, and a just regard for our safety, would require that he should remain among us long enough to forget some of his native prejudices, and acquire something like a community of interest with us before he should be dignified with the attributes of a sovereign. It cheapens and degrades the character of American sovereignty to bestow it indiscriminately on the ignorant and debased subjects of foreign monarchs—the outcasts of European Society—the convict or the pauper—on creatures ignorant of our language, incapable of understanding our constitution or the laws—whose votes as soon as they can be given are frequently sold for money, and whose united suffrages are often purchased like meat in the shambles. While such voters are to be found, *they will be bought and sold. They generate the*

corruption which stalks through our streets, and *they* make the ballot box rotten with iniquity. Make the traffic in money for voters familiar, and the leprous taint of lucre will soon infect your elections. The demoralization will extend wider and wider as your population, wealth and luxury, and the relative number of the poor increase in proportion to the number of the rich. The time will then come when office and place will be purchased by wealth alone—when every post from the Senate chamber to the Presidency will have its market price in money—or when poverty will be deemed a crime, and the poor man be disfranchised from the imperious necessity of erecting a barrier against corruption.

Shall we calmly see our country rushing headlong to such a condition, or shall we, while patriotism and public virtue have still sufficient adherents among us, preserve our Republic from such fatal dangers?



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